

for Opera North Children's Chorus

THE OXEN

Words by
THOMAS HARDY
(1840–1928)

Music by
RICHARD WILBERFORCE
(b 1984)

Jazz waltz, almost 1 in a bar $\text{♩} = 110$

unis
mp

SOPRANO
ALTO

PIANO

con Ped

19

twelve of the clock. "Now they are all on their knees,"

24

An - old - er said as we sat in a flock By the

29

em - bers in hearth - side ease.

ten

35

mp

mp

41

oo mp oo

47

mf

52

mp

We_ pic - tured the_ meek_ mild crea - tures where They

mp

57

dwelt in their straw - y pen, Nor did it oc - cur to

This system contains measures 57 through 62. It features a vocal line in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The lyrics are: "dwelt in their straw - y pen, Nor did it oc - cur to". Below the vocal line is a piano accompaniment consisting of two staves, a right-hand treble staff and a left-hand bass staff. The piano part includes various chords and melodic lines.

63

one of us there To doubt they were kneel - ing then.

This system contains measures 63 through 67. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "one of us there To doubt they were kneel - ing then.". The piano accompaniment continues with similar harmonic and melodic patterns.

68

ten

oo

ten

This system contains measures 68 through 72. The vocal line has a long note labeled "ten" (tenuto) and a breath mark. The piano accompaniment features a bass line with notes marked "p." (piano) and "oo" (fermata). The system ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

73

mp

oo

mp

oo

This system contains measures 73 through 77. The vocal line begins with a dynamic marking of *mp* (mezzo-piano) and a long note. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings of *mp* and *p.* (piano), and notes marked "oo" (fermata). The system concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

80

oo

mp

mf

86

mp

So fair a fan - cy

mp

91

few would weave In these years! Yet, I feel,

96

ten

If some - one said on Christ - mas Eve,

ten

101 *p* *ten*

“Come; see the o - xen kneel”

106 *mp*

112 *mp*

★

★divide equally in 3

118

Musical score for measures 118-122. The score consists of three vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal lines are characterized by long, flowing melodic phrases with various ornaments and slurs. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines in both hands.

123

unis mf

"In the lone - ly bar - ton by yon - der

Musical score for measures 123-127. This section includes a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a rest followed by the lyrics "In the lone - ly bar - ton by yon - der". The piano accompaniment continues with harmonic accompaniment.

128

coomb Our child - hood used to know,"

Musical score for measures 128-132. This section includes a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "coomb Our child - hood used to know,". The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support.

poco meno mosso

133

p

I should go with him in the gloom, Hop-ing it might be

poco meno mosso

p

a tempo

139

ten

so. oo so.

ten mf

so. oo

a tempo

ten mf

144

mf

oo

mf

oo

mf

149 *mp* *p*

★

154

159 **rit**

★divide equally in 3

Composer's note

Thomas Hardy's atmospheric poem, *The Oxen*, has long been a favourite evocation of the close-huddled nativity scene, and singing (literally) hundreds of carol services with the wonderful choir of St Bride's Church, Fleet Street, London it was always this reading that I anticipated the most. Another setting that I greatly admire is that of Jonathan Rathbone, and it was his sound world that encouraged me to give Hardy's words a jazz treatment, with strong influences from Bill Evans, Miles Davies and Justin Hurwitz's score to the 2016 feature film *La La Land*. The somewhat unsettling harmonic turns of the verses give way to an increasingly sweeping melodic refrain, all of which is underpinned by a gently undulating yet quietly driving piano part.

Duration: 4½ minutes

Text

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

Thomas Hardy
(1840–1928)

Richard Wilberforce



Photo: © Ben McKee

Originally from London, Richard studied at the University of Cambridge and the Royal College of Music, and now shares his time between France and the UK, where he holds a conducting and teaching position at the Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional de Paris, chorus masters the Leeds Philharmonic Chorus and fulfils his role as Composer-in-Residence with Trinity Boys Choir. His works are performed globally and have been recorded and broadcast by a number of leading choirs. For many years he was conductor of the Exon Singers and Director of the Hallé Youth Choir, and has conducted many of the UK's and France's foremost choirs. After an early success with the BBC Proms Young Composer Competition, Richard made composition the main focus of his time at Cambridge University, where he studied with Robin Holloway and Giles Swayne. His passion for writing for voices has been influenced by his first career as a countertenor, and one of his guiding ambitions as a composer is to write vocal lines that are rewarding for singers to sing, and melodies that are infectious!

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